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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: KIROVOHRAD: IT'S A TWO PARTY RACE,
ELECTIONS WILL BE CLEAN, A SIDE TRIP BACK IN TIME

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James Pettit for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (SBU) Summary: In conversations with Kirovohrad's Communist mayor, Our Ukraine Governor, and various campaign workers regarding preparations for the September 30 elections, opinion across the spectrum was that Regions and BYuT will be the top two vote getters with about 25-30 percent each, with Our Ukraine-People's Self Defense (OU-PSD) coming in a strong third with 15 percent, and that by and large, the elections would be clean. The other widespread consensus was that NATO and the Russian language question have little resonance in the region, where bread and butter economic issues dominate the local debate. Even the local Regions representatives acknowledged these issues were an electoral ploy aimed at retaining votes in the East that might otherwise go to the Communists. All agreed that the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) was in serious electoral trouble, voter turnout would be high in spite of voter disillusion, and a large number of local voters were still undecided.

12. (C) Comment. If local political players are to be believed, Kirovohrad will have free and fair elections, but this will be a very competitive election in a hotly contested central swing oblast. Muddled local politics and a past history of voter fraud still make Kirovohrad a prime target for election abuses. Because of the implosion of the SPU and local dissatisfaction with a BYuT Rada member, Regions and OU-PSD stand to improve on their 2006 election totals, but 20 percent of voters remain undecided and are up for grabs. All major parties in the oblast have opted to focus their campaigns on convincing voters that they will best provide solutions to local problems, ignoring their parties' national-level issues, such as Russian language, NATO, and parliamentary immunity. With virtually no discernible difference in platforms, whoever can convince voters they will tackle unemployment, build up infrastructure, improve housing, and increase salaries/pensions stands to win the large number of undecideds. This may put OU-PSD at a disadvantage because unlike Regions' "Stability and Well-being" or BYuT's "Ukrainian Breakthrough", the OU-PSD campaign is constrained by a lack of message or overarching theme that can be used as a framework to discuss local issues. End Summary and Comment.

Kirovohrad: Checkered Election History

13. (SBU) Kirovohrad is a largely agricultural, poor oblast in central Ukraine and a former stronghold for BYuT and SPU. Parliamentary results in 2006 were BYuT - 30 percent, Regions - 20 percent, SPU - 10 percent, OU - 9 percent, Communists -

6 percent, Lytvyn bloc - 5 percent. Kirovohrad is the home of the notorious TEC 100 electoral region in which widespread fraud took place in the 2004 presidential election. Throughout the oblast, support for Yushchenko grew from 48 percent to 63 percent between the second and third rounds of the election. The Communist Mayor, Volodymyr Puzakov, won a hotly contested mayoral by-election in November 2006. The repeat election took place after the winner of the March 2006 mayoral race, popular local BYuT leader Valeriy Kalchenko, was elected both as mayor and to the Rada, and chose to take his Rada seat -- a decision that angered many local BYuT supporters and threw the mayoral race into chaos. Puzakov prevailed after backroom dealing with the Party of Regions (PR) and local businessmen gave him a slim victory over young up-and-coming Our Ukraine candidate Oleksandr Danuta. Before 2004, local politics was dominated by the now defunct Labor Ukraine party which was associated closely with former President Kuchma's son-in-law Viktor Pinchuk.

Disorganized Headquarters and Muddled Campaign Messages

¶4. (C) DCM and POLOFF visited OU-PSD, BYuT, and Regions headquarters, September 10-11. BYuT headquarters appeared the most organized internally and externally; the OU-PSD and Regions headquarters directors did not bother to show up for our meetings. The local BYuT campaign manager expected to win the oblast with about 40 percent, compared to 20 percent for OU-PSD and Regions a close third. (Note: This estimate is way out of line with even OU-PSD internal numbers and likely amounts to wishful thinking. End note.) BYuT indicated it suspected large-scale fraud in the oblast, but could not substantiate the claim. BYuT's representative suspected collusion between the mayor, Regions campaign, and administrators of schools, medical facilities, and other public institutions to block BYuT from campaigning in certain public entities while allowing Regions representatives

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access. (Note: A Peace Corps volunteer indicated to Poloff during the visit that Regions representatives held a political meeting in the school in which he works. The local staff was required to attend so this claim appears to have some legitimacy. End note) The BYuT representative thought voters strongly supported NATO and were against giving Russian the status of an official language, but did not think such "election tricks" would play much of a role in the upcoming elections.

¶5. (C) After the OU-PSD local campaign chief skipped the meeting, we met with two campaign workers instead. According to them, BYuT and Regions would finish first and second and were polling at 20 percent, OU - PSD third with 13 percent, and 23 percent still undecided. They said Regions and OU-PSD would get a higher percentage than in 2006 and BYuT and the Socialists would drop, the former because of the mayoral issue and the latter due to a lack of money and disillusionment with Socialist leader and Rada Speaker Moroz's decision to join a Regions-led government. Local infrastructure, employment, and communal payments dominated local politics while NATO and Russian language were non-issues in the election. The OU-PSD workers appreciated election help from Kyiv, but lamented that its use was limited due to a top down structure that was not responsive to local issues. The local campaign has tried to morph the major OU-PSD message of abolishing parliamentary immunity into a more broad, "we stand for fairness and no privileges message," (i.e., if you pay your bills, you will get service, if the mayor has hot water, you should have hot water!). The workers expected free and fair elections, the only problems were technical in nature.

¶6. (C) Regions was also disorganized, canceling one meeting, then not having their contact there for the second. However, we eventually met with Rada MP Stepan Tsapiuk as a representative of Regions. Tsapiuk observed that

preparations for the election were going smoothly; relations between parties were not great but cordial and proper because all understood the need for clean elections. He believed that Regions and BYuT would each get around 30 percent of the vote and OU-PSD 15 percent, with unemployment and infrastructure the main local issues. Interestingly enough, Tsapiuk openly admitted that the NATO and Russian language

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issues were a dead end in the oblast. He said the maneuver was a political trick to keep votes in the East that might go to the Communists. Additionally, Tsapiuk said Regions was not against NATO, it was simply not ready to join yet.

OU Governor Feels Cut off from Kyiv

17. (C) On his own initiative, Chernysh invited the press to the beginning of the meeting and answered questions about relations with the mayor and the elections as one might expect of a polished politician. Afterwards in private, Chernysh indicated that he felt the election results would be roughly the same as in 2006, with BYuT and Regions coming in first and second, and OU - PSD third. According to him, BYuT will fare worse in the city because of Kalchenko's decision to take a Rada Seat, but this would not influence voting in the rest of the oblast. Chernysh lamented the centralization of the OU-PSD campaign in Kyiv, which he said isn't listening to what oblast voters really care about. Chernysh said NATO and the Russian language questions were getting no traction whatsoever in the region. Chernysh noted that local issues like unemployment, poor infrastructure, rising community tariffs, and low salaries are far and away the most important to the electorate. Chernysh was encouraged by local cooperation among parties and expects clean elections, but somberly noted Kirovohrad had a dubious election history. He expected fairly extensive post-election litigation, depending on the results. Although the electorate is fatigued, he expected a good turnout of over 60 percent. He could not really speculate as to the make-up of the national coalition, but spoke of fissures in both OU-PSD and Regions. He noted business leaders in both parties preferred to work together in a Regions/OU-PSD coalition but that both parties have large elements that do not want a Regions/OU-PSD coalition under any circumstance. Chernysh said very little distinguishes the parties; future electoral success for OU-PSD will be based on providing good governance at a local level to attract future voters.

Meeting with Communist Mayor - A Walk Back in Time

18. (C) The meeting started cordially. Puzakov opined that Regions would come in first, BYuT second, and OU-PSD third. Puzakov said that Kalchenko's decision to take a Rada seat

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instead of remaining as mayor soured a large number of BYuT supporters and that BYuT supporters no longer believed that BYuT cared about the little people. Puzakov pointed to a recent Tymoshenko rally where only 2,500 people attended as evidence of her decreasing popularity. He said the majority of the crowd was bussed in from the villages, and he compared it, unfavorably, to a 2006 Tymoshenko visit where she had 10,000 people come out and support her. (Note: This version of events was also brought up independently by OU-PSD, who agreed that Tymoshenko has lost support in the city. End note.) The mayor indicated the Communists, SPU, and Lytvyn Bloc would get over the 3 percent threshold in the oblast, but noted that SPU support had waned. The mayor acknowledged tough relations with governor Chernysh, but said relations were correct. Both were trying to solve problems and the friction consisted of who should get credit. The mayor said NATO and the Russian language issues were not driving the election and had little resonance, although he mentioned that by his calculations 90 percent of voters were anti-NATO and

supported giving Russian language an official status. Infrastructure, repair of communal property, and lack of decent employment were the main issues for the electorate. He indicated that voter fatigue was real, but turnout would be over 60 percent.

¶9. (C) After 15 minutes of sounding reasonable and astute, like a moth to a flame, the mayor launched into a long tirade about how the United States destroyed the Soviet economy, an economy which was much more developed than that of the United States. He lamented that many factories in Kirovohrad had closed, leaving the oblast poor with lots of unemployment. Notably, he singled out the famous typewriter factory that had provided the whole Soviet Union with typewriters, seemingly oblivious to the fact that typewriters are now virtually obsolete. He wistfully recalled tractor brigades harvesting the bounty of the land, free abundant food, universal health care, and the general paradise that was the former Soviet Union. Curiously, the mayor stated that vast majorities of Westerners are clamoring to live today like Ukrainians used to live in Soviet times. The DCM expressed disagreement with the mayor's factually challenged assertions, informing the mayor that he lived in the Soviet Union both as a student and diplomat and saw what life was like with his own eyes. The mayor, taken aback but undaunted, countered that he had been to Italy. (Note: Apart from BYuT, the unanimous consensus among local politicians and election workers is that the mayor is a cartoonish buffoon, however they noted that he was not interfering with elections in any way and largely agreed with his readout on the political scene in Kirovohrad. End note.)

Young Politicians See Upcoming Elections as Free and Fair

¶10. (C) During lunch with a group of local council members, Oleksandr Danutsa (OU), Andriy Drobin (SPU), Roman Kolisnichenko (BYuT), and Andriy Kuryan (Regions), all stated that their parties would be monitoring elections closely but agreed the election would be free and fair. The consensus was that the top two parties in the oblast would be Regions and BYuT followed by OU-PSD. All scoffed at the idea of Ukraine breaking apart into east and west regardless of election results. Most notably, the Regions council member stated he personally was against Russian having official language status and that NATO and the Russian language issue were base politics. All agree that the NATO/Russian language issues had no resonance in the oblast.

¶11. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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